

# *Information Privilege:* Talking to Undergraduates about Scholarly Communication

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.....  
COPPUL Scholarly Communications Regional Training Day  
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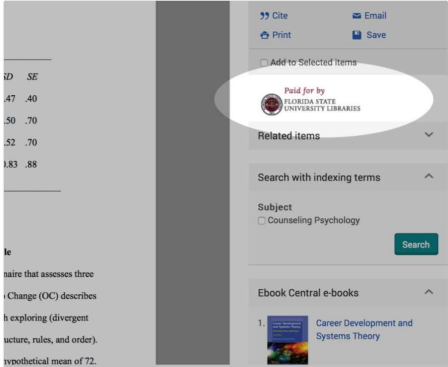
## Outline

- WHAT is “Information Privilege”?
  - WHAT is the problem? & So what?
- WHY is it important to talk to undergraduates about this?
- HOW can we do this?

WHAT is information  
privilege?

 **Nick Byrd**  
@byrd\_nick Follow

A helpful reminder of my #privilege. And a reminder of why I care about #OpenAccess. Thanks @FSULibrary, @petitelibrarian, @DevinSope




The screenshot shows a library catalog record. On the right side, there are options: Cite, Email, Print, and Save. Below these is a section 'Add to Selected Items' with a dropdown arrow. A callout bubble points to the 'Paid for by' field, which lists 'FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES'. Below that is a 'Related items' section with a dropdown arrow. Further down is a 'Search with indexing terms' section with a 'Subject' dropdown menu showing 'Counseling Psychology' and a 'Search' button. At the bottom of the screenshot is the 'Ebook Central e-books' section, listing '1. Career Development and Systems Theory'.

**A helpful reminder of my privilege. And a reminder of why I care about Open Access.**

9:01 AM - 11 Apr 2017  
[https://twitter.com/byrd\\_nick/status/851812567009853441](https://twitter.com/byrd_nick/status/851812567009853441)


An example of a faculty member aware of his information privilege

 **Anne Baber Wallis**  
@abwallis Follow ▼

Replying to @glynmoody @edrybicki @graysouth

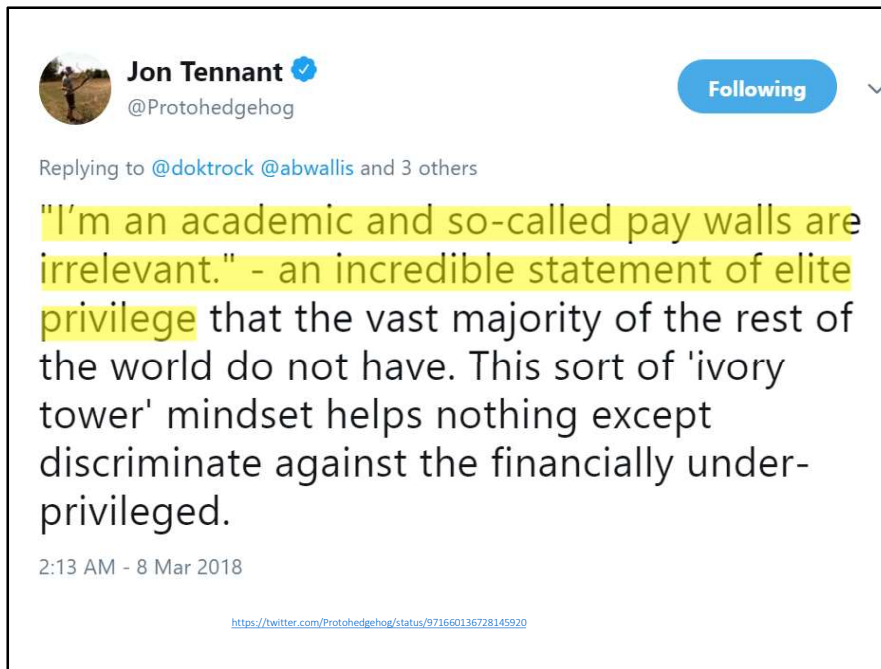
I'm an academic and so-called pay walls are irrelevant. We have an excellent library w/access to 1000s of journals via PubMed. There's nothing wrong w/jnl subscriber fees & it wouldn't change 11,000 deaths or the bat hypothesis. 🦇

5:54 AM - 7 Mar 2018 from Jeffersontown, KY

2 Likes 

<https://twitter.com/abwallis/status/971353383037784064>

And one that is NOT.



And the response from another calling her out on her “statement of elite privilege”.

Definition: *Privilege*

“A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.”

Oxford Dictionaries

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/privilege>

## Definition: *Information Privilege*

“The affordance or opportunity to access information that others cannot is called information privilege.”

(Hare & Evanson, 2018, p.726)



By dozemode, CC0, <https://pixabay.com/photo-3139991/>

- The term “information privilege” has been around for a number of years, but I like this definition from a paper by Hare & Evanson.
- Often, when we’re talking of those with information privilege, we are talking of people like us:
  - With institutional affiliations at large research universities in rich, western countries
  - We are among the privileged few that have relative ease of access to most of the scholarly literature we need for our research and teaching
  - So much so that, like other forms of privilege, it is often difficult for us to recognize the privilege and see that others do not have the same information access that we do



## “On Information Privilege”

In 2014,  
Char Booth coined the  
term  
**“information privilege”**  
on her blog:  
*info-mational*



<https://infomational.com/2014/12/01/on-information-privilege/>

- Char Booth was the first to coin the term “information privilege”, and then more fully flesh out the idea in this blog post from 2014, and several presentations over the years
- Booth is an academic librarian and Associate Dean at California State University San Marcos

## “On Information Privilege”

Students in Booth’s seminar:

*“Why in the world does it cost so much?”*

*“It doesn’t make sense!”*

*“You mean all libraries have to pay like this?”*

*“Why can’t we use this stuff after we graduate?”*



(Booth, 2014)

- Booth talks about a seminar she held to help students recognize their information privilege
  - She started by illustrating the library’s multi-million dollar materials budget, challenging the tenacious notion that “information is free”
  - Then “...facilitated a discussion about the implications of a system in which significant areas of knowledge are available to a privileged few (i.e. THEM!)”
  - In her words: “...it was a literally jaw-dropping illustration of a paywall that none of them knew existed”
  - The quotes on this slide are the reactions of the students in that seminar

## ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education

### ***Frame: Information has Value***

#### Learners...

- “recognize issues of access or lack of access to information sources”
- “are inclined to examine their own information privilege”

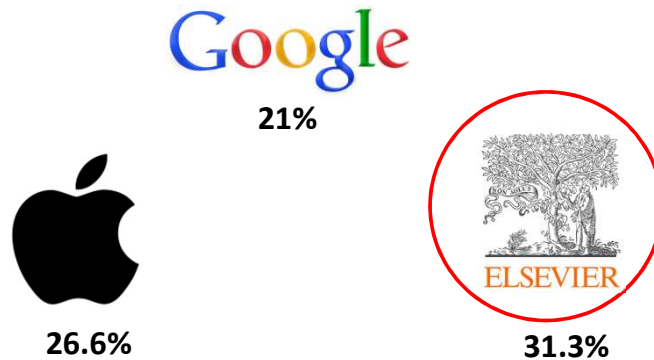
(ACRL, 2016)

- Often when librarians get invited into classes it is to teach students how to locate, access, and assess information
- Often nowadays librarians also try to teach about some of the social, cultural, political, and **economic** issues surrounding information
- The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) – Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education is a guiding document for academic librarians teaching information literacy skills to students
- The Framework is based on an interconnected group of core concepts (or “Frames”); there are six Frames – one of which is *Information has Value*
- There are a long list of learning goals under this Frame, and some address information privilege as you can see on this slide
- The Framework is meant to be a high level document; it does not offer any suggestions on how to teach students about this

WHAT is the problem?

Why is there inequity of access to scholarly information?  
Let's talk a bit about the economics of scholarly publishing...

Who had the highest profit margin in 2018?



All logos CC0 from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

Profit margin = Profit margin usually refers to the percentage of revenue remaining after all costs, depreciation, interest, taxes, and other expenses have been deducted. The formula is:  $(\text{Total Sales} - \text{Total Expenses}) / \text{Total Sales} = \text{Profit Margin}$ . (<http://www.investinganswers.com/financial-dictionary/businesses-corporations/profit-margin-5116>)

Data in this slide from Jaclyn McLean & Ken Ladd of USask Library (thanks!):

Elsevier: <https://www.relx.com/~media/Files/R/RELX-Group/documents/reports/annual-reports/2018-annual-report.pdf>

Google: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-04/alphabet-profit-margins-slide-as-google-costs-march-upwards>

Apple: <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-08-02/apple-aapl-at-1-trillion-honey-i-shrunk-the-profit-margins>

More data:

2010 data : <https://www.economist.com/business/2011/05/26/of-goats-and-headaches>

2017 data: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/it-time-nationalise-academic-publishers>

Also this one: And 2017 Guardian article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jun/27/profitable-business-scientific-publishing-bad-for-science>

## Is it time to nationalise academic publishers?

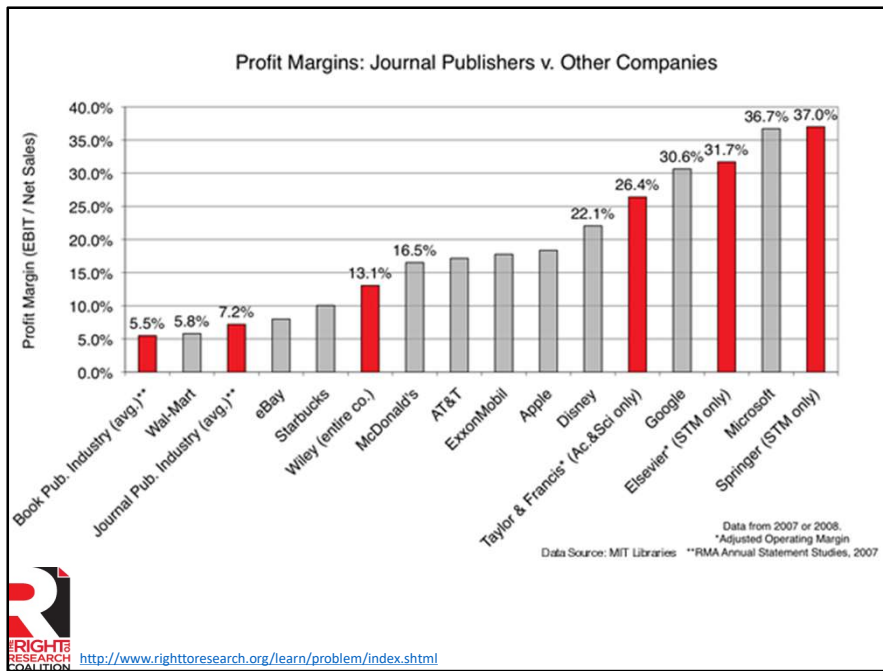
With state intervention back in vogue, and publishers' profit margins still sky-high, journals could be the next monopoly to come under scrutiny

March 2, 2018

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/it-time-nationalise-academic-publishers>

### 2017 profit margin data:

- Google 24%
- Wiley 29.6 %
- Elsevier (RELX) 36.8%
- Informa (Taylor & Francis, Routledge) 38%
- Facebook 50% (!!)



We like to pick on Elsevier because it is the biggest commercial publisher of scholarly work, but they are by no means alone.

\*graph from Right to Research Coalition – founded by students to promote open scholarly publishing

So what?



## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?



# WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?



# WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

 **university**  
(taxpayer \$, tuition \$, etc.)

+

 **grant**

→

**pay faculty to do research & report on results in articles**



**faculty give away articles & copyright to publishers for FREE**  
(and other researchers peer review for free)

→

**& publishers rake in all the \$**  
(and it is BIG)



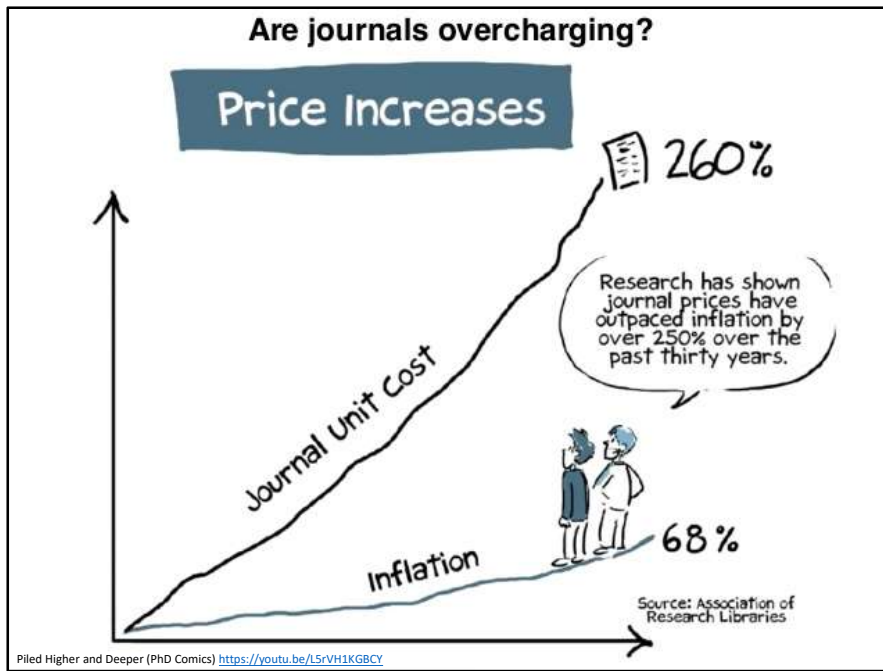
31.2%  
30.6%

**Elsevier's profit margin exceeded Google's!**

**... and many students, researchers, and others still can't get the articles they need & libraries cannot afford many journals.**

→





Screenshot from <https://youtu.be/L5rVH1KGBCY>

## CARL Members Journal Subscription Cost Data

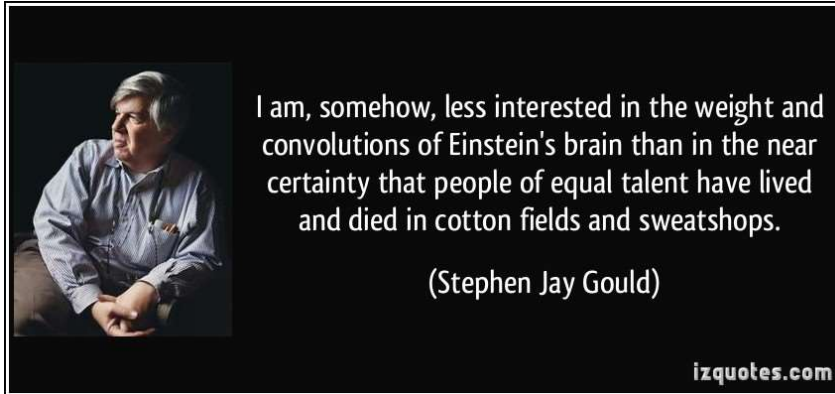
INSTITUTION	SUBSCRIPTION	YEAR	VENDOR PRICE (CAD)
University of Saskatchewan	Cambridge Journals Online	FY2016-17	\$82,458.21
University of Saskatchewan	MathSciNet and Consortium Database Fees	FY2016-17	\$12,865.73
University of Saskatchewan	NRC Research Press Journals	FY2016-17	\$14,862.00
University of Saskatchewan	Oxford Journals Online	FY2016-17	\$123,141.60
University of Saskatchewan	RSC Electronic Journals	FY2016-17	\$22,188.25
University of Saskatchewan	Sage Premier All-Access	FY2016-17	\$129,848.66
University of Saskatchewan	ScienceDirect-Freedom Collection, Incl. Academic Press	FY2016-17	\$1,516,443.99
University of Saskatchewan	Scopus	FY2016-17	\$115,581.19
University of Saskatchewan	Taylor & Francis Journals (SSH/S&T/Medical)	FY2016-17	\$462,063.00
University of Saskatchewan	Web of Knowledge	FY2016-17	\$23,937.55
University of Saskatchewan	Web of Science	FY2016-17	\$110,921.09
University of Saskatchewan	Wiley Online Library (Database)	FY2016-17	\$912,286.76

<http://www.carl-abrc.ca/news/carl-members-release-journal-subscription-cost-data/>

### CARL Members Release Journal Subscription Cost Data

<http://www.carl-abrc.ca/news/carl-members-release-journal-subscription-cost-data/>

So what?



As quoted in New Scientist, March 8, 1979, p. 777

Image from: <https://izquotes.com/quote/stephen-jay-gould/i-am-somehow-less-interested-in-the-weight-and-convolutions-of-einstein-s-brain-than-in-the-near-232836>

So what?

**“Information  
*UNDER*privilege”**



<https://infomational.com/2014/12/01/on-information-privilege/>

WHY talk to undergrads  
about this?

**Typically librarians have directed schol comm outreach and advocacy at grad students & faculty, but there is compelling reasons to engage undergraduates with this topic too.**



## Why talk to undergrads about this?

Ethical, Practical, & Strategic reasons...

### *Ethical:*

- They have right to know how their tuition and tax dollars are spent

### *Practical:*

- Prepare them for their information ***under***privilege upon graduation

## Why talk to undergrads about this?

### *Practical:*

Because they are increasingly involved in...

- undergraduate research experiences
- undergraduate research journals

“...student researchers lack a broad understanding of the scholarly communication topics that are relevant to their undergraduate research experiences...”

(Riehle & Hensley, 2017, p.175)

- Most have no official instruction on how journals and publishing works
- I think many professors just expect they already know this / someone else has taught it

## Curse of Knowledge

=

“...occurs when an individual, communicating with other individuals, unknowingly assumes that the others have the background to understand.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse\\_of\\_knowledge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curse_of_knowledge)

- Professors often don't explicitly teach students (especially undergrads) about how publishing works, or other school comm topics
- Either they assume others have already taught this or that the students just know
- It is a classic "Curse of Knowledge" problem

# Why talk to undergrads about this?

*Practical:*

**Because they're interested!**

Opinion article by Sarah Foley in USask's undergrad student newspaper *The Sheaf*



## Check your information privilege

By Sarah Foley — March 21, 2019 — in Opinions



As students of higher education, undergraduates at the University of Saskatchewan have unique — and often temporary — access to resources that afford students the opportunity to participate in scholarly conversations and build upon existing academic work in ways that others cannot.

This ability to access information and spaces is called information privilege. This term was coined by Char Booth, associate dean of the library at California State University San Marcos. As people in a position of privilege, it is important for academics to examine where they are situated in the world of information. Constructing barriers to access can allow academics to create a more equitable, just, innovative and collaborative world of knowledge creation.

The U of S library provides access to scholarly works that are usually kept behind paywalls for the general public. Paywalls make information less accessible by putting a prohibitive price tag on knowledge for those outside of academic

<https://thesheaf.com/2019/03/21/check-your-information-privilege/>

## Undergrads in their own words

“Whenever I have talked with other undergraduates about information privilege, they are surprised at how much access to information costs and interested to learn more about it..”



Sarah Foley, 4<sup>th</sup> year biology/political studies student

## Undergrads in their own words

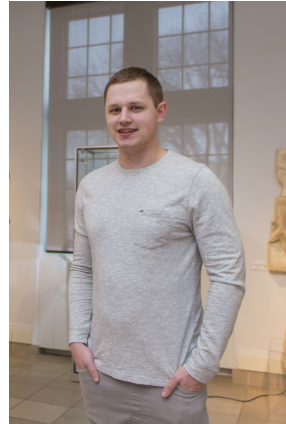
“This knowledge entirely changes how I think about my academic career and the information that I engage with on a daily basis.”



Sarah Foley, 4<sup>th</sup> year Biology/Political Studies

## Undergrads in their own words

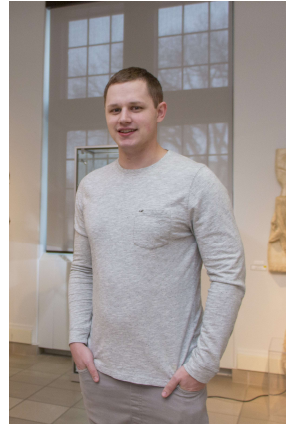
“I am going to be losing access when I graduate in May despite being a part of a research team and I have yet to figure out what that will look like.”



Andrew Wiebe, 6<sup>th</sup> year Classical, Medieval & Renaissance Studies

## Undergrads in their own words

“Recognizing that we have these tools while they are accessible to us should influence our decisions as citizens of the world.”



Andrew Wiebe, 6<sup>th</sup> year Classical, Medieval & Renaissance Studies



Why talk to undergrads about this?

*Strategic:*

**They are our future  
researchers!**

- Not all of them of course, but some
- And even if they don't become researchers, I still think it is important to make sure they are informed citizens

“Undergraduate students are our future researchers and scholars. We will not be able to rectify our current scholarly communication system or address the disparity in information access without them.”

(Hare & Evanson, 2018, p734)

HOW can we talk to  
undergrads about this?

## 1. Raising Awareness

- Outreach about schol comm topics (especially economics of information), for the purpose of informing/raising awareness

What is the  
annual  
institutional  
(online only)  
subscription fee  
for 2018?



Journal of  
Comparative  
Neurology



**\$33,835**

[https://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1096-9861&doi=10.1002/\(ISSN\)1096-9861](https://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1096-9861&doi=10.1002/(ISSN)1096-9861)

The Journal of Comparative Neurology \$33835  
[https://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1096-9861&doi=10.1002/\(ISSN\)1096-9861](https://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1096-9861&doi=10.1002/(ISSN)1096-9861)

## *Journal of Applied Polymer Science*



What is the annual institutional (online only) subscription fee for 2018?

- a) \$585
- b) \$6098
- c) \$12,495
- d) \$35,859\*

\* [http://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1097-4628&doi=10.1002/\(ISSN\)1097-4628](http://ordering.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/subs.asp?ref=1097-4628&doi=10.1002/(ISSN)1097-4628)

So, just how much do journal subscriptions cost?

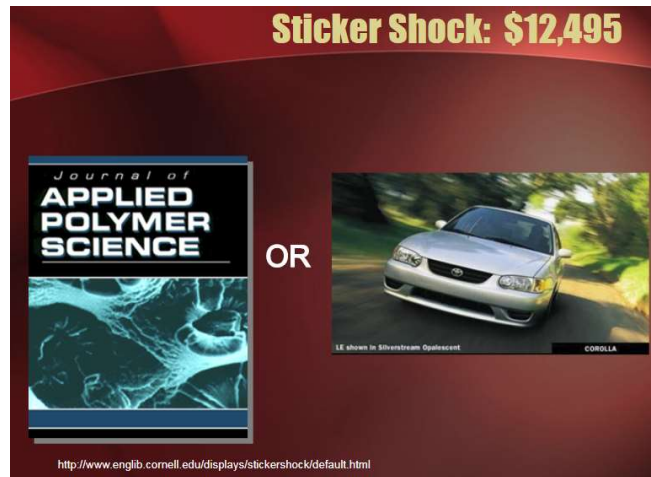
This is one of our most expensive titles.

Students are generally surprised that journals cost anything at all, but when they find out just how much some of them cost they are shocked.

Yes, producing a journal costs money. But I think it is fair to say that this is exorbitant. And well beyond what it actually costs to produce the journal – particularly when all of the content, and quality control (peer review) is given for free. And when by-and-large most institutions are no longer getting print editions, so the costs of printing and shipping are mostly gone. (This journal does still have print available, but many titles are now online only).

This is unreasonable and unsustainable – and this is just one example.

## Cornell Library's Sticker Shock Exhibit (2002)



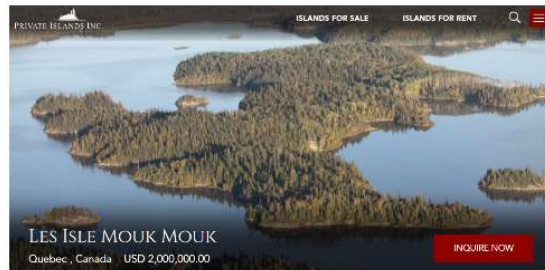
<http://slideplayer.com/slide/7736889/>

- Another effective way to raise awareness students is through price comparisons

### Cornell's "Sticker Shock" exhibit (2002)

- innovative campaign led by the Engineering Library at Cornell, taken done now so I only have this screenshot from someone else's slide!
- \$12000 actually seems like a bargain now
- You get a sense that not only are prices unreasonable, but they are constantly rising well beyond inflation.

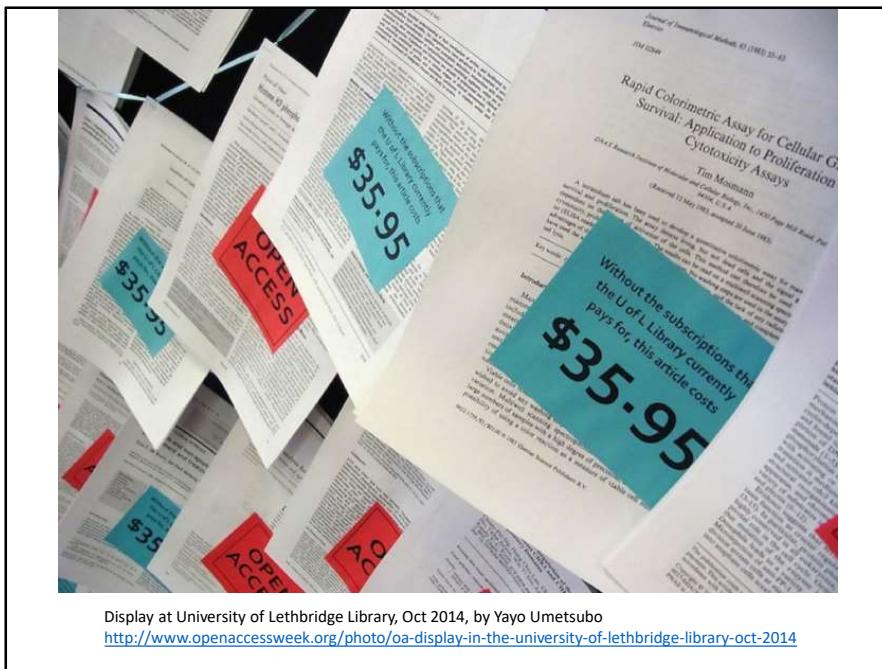
## Which costs more?



Your own private island ... or one year of institutional access to Elsevier academic journals.

From the Library 101 Toolkit (Information Privilege) produced and shared (CC BY NC) by Duke University  
Libraries: [https://sites.duke.edu/library101\\_instructors/2018/08/13/information-privilege/](https://sites.duke.edu/library101_instructors/2018/08/13/information-privilege/)





Display at University of Lethbridge Library, Oct 2014, by Yayo Umetsubo  
<http://www.openaccessweek.org/photo/oa-display-in-the-university-of-lethbridge-library-oct-2014>

## Infiltrating the “one shot” information literacy session!

- Mention cost of resources and that the library is paying for these on their behalf (“we are fortunate to have access...”)
- Mention alternate resources they can use upon graduation (e.g. Google Scholar, PubMed)
- Mention alternate means of access to articles upon graduation (e.g. OA versions through UnPaywall & IRs, walk-in access)

- We do not have many opportunities to communicate these concepts in depth in our regularly scheduled classes
- Often we have limited time as a guest in a class, and the prof wants us to teach about a very specific topic: eg searching for articles in a database
- Here are some ideas that you can insert into those sessions to help raise awareness
- This is also a service to students who often have no idea they’ll lose access to e-resources upon graduation, and what some alternate resources and means of access might be

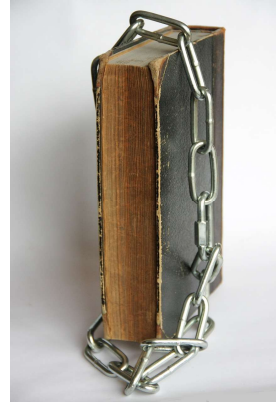
## 2. Engagement & Action

- Beyond just raising awareness and giving information...

“...outreach is most transformative when students are asked to reflect on their own power and privilege”

(Hare & Evanson, 2018, p.729)

- Engage students with problems that help them understand how these issues affect them and others directly



By dozemode, CC0, <https://pixabay.com/photo-3139991/>

Engage students in discussion:

- Present them with case studies of scenarios where an author/creator has limited or no access (Hare & Evanson, 2018)
- Present them with challenging questions for discussion...

## Discussion question examples:

- Who has access to scholarly information and who does not?
- Should access to scholarly information be free (why or why not)?
- Should access to information be a human right? (Give an example: study reporting experimental cancer treatments; access to legal information for someone who is incarcerated). If not, are there certain types of information that you think should be free vs. others that should have a fee?
- What barriers to information access can you think of?
- "Access to science is going to be a first-world privilege ... that's the opposite of what science is supposed to be about." — Guy Geltner, Professor of History, University of Amsterdam

From the Library 101 Toolkit (Information Privilege) produced and shared (CC BY NC) by Duke University Libraries: [https://sites.duke.edu/library101\\_instructors/2018/08/13/information-privilege/](https://sites.duke.edu/library101_instructors/2018/08/13/information-privilege/)

## Incorporate into student assignments:

### Example:

- Develop an assignment requiring students locate art, music, or other media that they can reuse, remix, and redistribute (legally!)
- Then freely post their own creation online with a CC license of their choice for reuse
- Idea can be applied to any undergrad research project

(Davis-Kahl, 2012)

## Support an Undergraduate Research Journal:

“Without my experiences at USURJ and in my elective course in librarianship, I would have had very low, if any, exposure to the concept.”



Sarah Foley, 4<sup>th</sup> year Biology/Political Studies



Lots more practical ideas:

“Why Does Google Scholar Sometimes  
Ask for Money?”

Engaging Science Students in Scholarly  
Communication and the Economics of  
Information

(Warren & Duckett, 2010)

- This article is a wealth of useful, practical instruction ideas for these topics
- They have a “Price is Right” idea which I modified earlier

## References

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